

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM MEDIA EMBEDDING:
WAVE OF THE FUTURE OR FLASH IN THE PAN

by

Colonel Franklin Childress
United States Army

Dr. Douglas V. Johnson
Project Advisor

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CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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ABSTRACT

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The Media Embedding program executed by DOD during Operation Iraqi Freedom is widely accepted as an overwhelming success for the military by most observers. My paper examines five controversial issues and their implications for the next war where media embedding is practiced.

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OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM MEDIA EMBEDDING: WAVE OF THE FUTURE OF FLASH IN THE PAN

There is no doubt that the Media Embedding program that was launched by the Department of Defense in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom was one of the most successful ventures between the military and the media in history. It is also the most widely written about in academia, military and research publications. While most of the research has centered on the wide-angle view of the program and its background, that is not the focus for this paper. The purpose of this project is to drill down into two broad areas by conducting a critical analysis of five particular issues that need to be addressed and resolved by both the military and the media before the next major conflict involving large numbers of embedded media. I will examine the areas of media equipping and manning.

I do not seek to criticize any person or organization in this paper. My intent is to carefully examine the most controversial issues that occurred during the embedding program's lifespan and make recommendations on how to avoid some of the pitfalls and problems the next time we conduct large scale embedding.

I enter into this project realizing that some of the issues are beyond the scope of this paper and my ability to critically analyze; the embedded reporter versus the unilateral reporter discussion is but one of the issues that need to be discussed. My paper will take a unique angle in that most of the research comes from interviews and questionnaires provided directly by key decision makers and media representatives who were themselves involved in the Embed Program and researchers who have conducted extensive study on the topic.

I sincerely hope is that at the end of the project this paper will stimulate discussion by media and the military. That it will allow us to better understand the issues and work together to develop realistic solutions so that we don't repeat the mistakes made during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

BACKGROUND

On 27 January 2003, a group of Individual Augmentee Public Affairs Officers from each of the military services gathered in Tampa, Florida to form a team of professionals led by Mr. Jim Wilkerson, Special Assistant to General Franks (Public Affairs). This group would form the Joint Information Bureaus (JIB) in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Cyprus. The group that was sent to Kuwait City was charged with executing the lion's share of the Department of Defense (DOD) Media Embedding Program. Upon arrival, the group of ten augmentees was joined by the 318th Public Affairs Operations Center (32 Army Reserve personnel) and seven personnel from the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defense. The presence of the coalition personnel caused the JIB

to become a Coalition Press Information Center (CPIC); it was therefore known as CPIC Kuwait. The CPIC was set up in the Kuwait City Hilton and charged to work with the Coalition Land Forces Command (CFLCC) located at Camp Doha in Kuwait.

The CPIC was soon charged with the executing the practical aspects of the embedding program. DOD retained control of the program (who was and was not embedded) and CFLCC retained much of the policy guidance.

The issues that are examined in this paper are some of the most difficult ones that fell to the CPIC to wrestle with. Most issues were worked out to everyone's satisfaction at the time, but most of the solutions were stopgap measures and must be revisited by all parties before we do this again.

The first area is the issue of equipping the media. There are three specific issues in this section: Media Vehicles, NBC Equipment and the Thuraya Satphones.

MEDIA VEHICLES

ISSUE: DOD did not allow the media to bring their own vehicles to the war. This issue that was one of the most heated and highly contested of the war. In the end, several Army and Marine Commanders chose to disregard the DOD directive and allowed the media to bring their vehicles. The consequence of these decisions resulted in some of the most spectacular coverage of the conflict and would have been missed had the DOD prohibition been followed. The fact that media vehicles facilitated the best war reporting caused DOD not to take action against the military personnel or the media who did not follow the directive. Pandora's Box is now fully open; it is impossible to foresee a scenario with large scale embedding where media vehicles will not be used. Resolution of this issue must precede the next DOD Embedding decision.

DISCUSSION: The media vehicle issue must be looked at through several different lens to properly understand the issue.

THE DOD VIEW (CON)

"The question of whether the media could have it's own vehicles was a thorny one. The Department of Defense vehemently opposed the idea despite pleas from many in the media."¹

Mr. Brian Whitman describes his objections this way, "It was decided after lengthy discussions that one of the most dangerous situations that we could have out there in a fast-moving battle going over great distances was to have everybody show up with whatever type of vehicle they could get their hands on in Kuwait and try to keep up with the combat vehicles that

they'd be traveling with... It was made after considerable thought and discussion with the bureau chiefs—the people that made the assignments, that put (journalists out in the field).”²

The DOD opposed the media having their own vehicles for three primary reasons: control, logistics and safety. The issue of control of the media is legitimate and valid.

The DOD objected to media having vehicles because of the need to control the movement of the media on the battlefield. LT John Gay accurately describes the need to control the media, “The nature of the media is to be curious, with their own vehicles what is to prevent them from wandering off on their own, possibly endangering themselves and the military units they are supposed to be embedded with.”³ As part of the reporter signing the media guidelines he/she agreed to stay with their assigned unit, but with each reporter having his own vehicle there is no way that the units can adequately maintain control of the media who have their own agenda and unilaterally break the guidelines.

The second reason for not allowing media vehicles was the huge logistics burden that they would place on the military. There are three aspects of logistics that concerned DOD: fuel, recovery and spare parts.

Imagine, if you will, six hundred media representatives each showing up to the unit with a different type of vehicle; some of them would need gasoline, some would need diesel others would need different types of fuel. The logistics requirement would needlessly burden the military that is always short of fuel vehicles and transportation

The second logistics concern was recovery/repair of broken down media vehicles. The military is not resourced or equipped to recover and repair civilian vehicles; the requirements of repair/recovery for its own vehicles were huge. The desert in Southwest Asia is extremely damaging to military and civilian vehicles. To add the recovery and repair mission to the units who were scrambling to keep up with the repair and recovery mission of their own vehicles already damaged from combat and the environment would have proven to be an onerous additional burden.

The safety of embedded media is significantly compromised if each reporter has his/her own vehicle. Each of the media representatives who brought vehicles to the battlefield tailored their vehicle to their own specifications; most of these specifications did not consider the safety of the occupant during combat. They were tailored to maximize the broadcast capability and therefore, would have not been very safe in intense combat situations. Had DOD allowed all reporters to have their own vehicles we would have seen many more reporters injured or killed. Most media representatives riding with frontline units were made to ride in armored combat vehicles. The other aspect of safety is the issue of the vehicles breaking down. A broken down

media vehicle would either be left by the combat unit, with the loss of the broadcast capability and the occupants would be very vulnerable to the enemy or the military unit would be required to diminish its strength and to put lives at risk guarding each isolated broken down media vehicle.

The reasons that DOD decided not to allow media vehicles on the battlefield are obviously valid. The media would have demanded priority for fuel, maintenance, and other logistics functions; thereby, creating friction between the military who were required to support the embeds and the media who needed support to get their story out.

PRO

Some of the media took their vehicles anyway. (Walt) Rogers believed that to successfully broadcast to a cable news audience, he had to take along a satellite truck, which was a HMMWV with equipment inside and mounted on the roof. So Rodgers and his crew snuck their equipment into Iraq, with the help of the 7th Cavalry. Although forbidden by Washington, in Kuwait, the Army was complicit. Rogers said he was told to keep his mouth shut, lay low and quietly bring his truck to mile-marker 21. Meanwhile, Rodgers should pretend he'd never get his HMMWV into Iraq.⁴

The media, particularly the broadcast media, need vehicles to take advantage of their unique requirements for transmitting images and platforms for satellite dishes. Several of the commanders on the ground (Third Infantry Division and the I MEF) violated the DOD /CFLCC policy and allowed many of the broadcast media representatives to bring their own vehicles. The results were spectacular: David Bloom and his *Bloom Mobile* would have been impossible without the state of the art satellite truck that was following his armored vehicle; Walt Rodgers images of the tip of the spear going into Baghdad would not have been captured without his media vehicle; Greg Kelly and Oliver North both had media vehicles. The bottom-line is this; the media vehicles enabled the nation to see real-time images from the battlefield that resulted in a very positive public opinion of the military. Without the vehicles, it is doubtful that the Embed Program would have been as successful or as compelling as it was with the vehicles.

The second issue with media vehicles was the fact that DOD did not make the final decision on prohibiting the vehicles until the middle of February. Many media outlets had already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars procuring the vehicles, equipping them for combat conditions and transporting it to Kuwait. They acted in good faith by procuring vehicles that were compatible with military specifications for fuel and repair parts to reduce the potential unit burden. DOD should have made the decision earlier to preclude the news networks from expending the resources to buy, equip and transport vehicles in to theater.

Once the units accepted the small number of media vehicles they were responsible for the outcome of embedding the media with vehicles. It was very fortuitous that both the military and the media were able to work through all the problems they encountered and did not have any significant issues with the vehicles that were allowed to be a part of the embedding process.

Walt Rodgers describes it this way:

You are going to get your truck on the battlefield. When we get up there and they start seeing pictures, Rumsfeld's going to say, 'What a great idea this was.' But I must say it was the good soldiers with the U.S. Army in Kuwait who made all of this work and gave us that fantastic ability to file either by videophone or satellite from the battlefield. They made it work. They trusted us not to blow their cover. The story was told better because of the prescient genius of letting us do what we needed to do.⁵

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON MEDIA VEHICLES

The issue of allowing media vehicles on the battlefield is indeed a thorny problem. To allow them wholesale is neither practical nor smart. The military cannot handle the logistical, safety and control nightmares of allowing every media representative to have his own vehicle. On the other hand, the media must have satellite trucks to take advantage of the current state of the art in transmission technology. The Operation Iraqi Freedom Media Embedding Program would not have been the huge success it was without the media vehicles that were operating on the battlefield.

The media believe the military compromised and developed a workable commonsense solution to the issue and that it worked to the good of everyone concerned. Mr. Jeff Goldman, the CBS producer in Kuwait describes the situation this way, "I think in the end the decision to allow "certain" vehicles was the correct one and enabled even further enhancement of professional reporting especially in the electronic media arena."⁶

The truth is that the Department of Defense did not compromise their position; two of the unit PAOs and their commanders made the decision to allow media vehicles to travel with their units. This is a decision that remarkably enhanced the entire embedding effort, but could have resulted in negative consequences had the result turned out badly.

The best answer lies somewhere in the middle, every media representative does not need his own vehicle, but the television reporters do need the capability that the HMMWV's bring to the table. The Senior Leadership of DOD and the broadcast representatives must agree on a compromise solution to media vehicle early on (today is not too soon) so that Public Affairs Officers and Commanders are not placed in the situation they were in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The best answer on this issue is one received from COL Gary Hovatter, from APAC:

“We should allow media to have their own vehicle with the following qualifications:

- Need to establish hard standards...vehicle types, fuel, rules on maintenance, battlefield destruction, etc.
- Need to figure out equitable solutions for the “haves”, (those media who can afford such vehicles) “have-nots” (those media who cannot afford them) issue...have not media will raise hell if a media vehicle policy morphs into an access policy (i.e. no vehicle, no/less access).
- Need to be ready when the ‘have-nots’ ask to modify military vehicles.”⁷

This issue can result in the win-win it was for Iraqi Freedom if both sides are willing to compromise on a solution that they can both be satisfied with.

NBC EQUIPMENT

During the run up to OIF, the threat to Coalition forces from chemical and biological weapons or Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) was deemed to be acute. The common perspective by those in positions to know was not if WMD would hit forces but when. U.S. forces made it a priority to properly equip everyone who would go into harms way with the equipment, inoculations and training they would need to survive on the battlefield. (The training of media by the military is broadly recognized as a tremendous success; therefore, I will not address it in this paper.) When DOD made the decision to embed media with the military, the decision was made to equip the media with the same equipment that their military counterparts would get. The first problem was getting the equipment for the media and issuing it in theater before combat began in March. The second problem was recovering the equipment after the media disembedded. We will discuss these two problems in the following paragraphs:

NBC DISCUSSION

The twin issues the military faced with the NBC equipment were issuing the equipment and getting it back at the end of the embedding period. The media that embedded at home station with their units did not have the same problem with these two issues as the media who received their equipment in theater and were on the hook for returning the equipment to the U.S. government in Kuwait.

When the Embedding concept was developed, DOD made the assumption that all the media would embed with their units at their home station prior to departing the Continental United States (CONUS). The NBC equipment that was needed by the reporters was to be issued at home station and returned to the issuing location by the reporter at the end of embedding. That plan worked fine for those media who linked up with their units prior to the

departure from (CONUS). Unfortunately, the bulk of the Embedded Media were with the Third Infantry Division (3ID), the Marine Expeditionary Force and several other units who got to theater before DOD made the Embedding decision. A decision was made that those media representatives who did not have the NBC gear would receive it in theater. The units in theater did not have enough on-hand stocks to issue the equipment. Unfortunately, DOD and the Joint Staff did not task any service until very late in the game when the Army was appointed as the Executive Agent for providing the NBC Equipment for the media from war stocks. Rick Wright describes the situation, "CFLCC PAO worked the issue hard and non-stop to make it happen, dealing with the Department of the Army G-4, Army Materiel Command (AMC), and warehouses in Kuwait, etc. It all came together in time to issue equipment to embeds and then get them to units. They would have embedded earlier in Kuwait, if they had the equipment earlier, but embedding still began about 11 March 2003."⁸ The difficulties with the NBC equipment issue were finally resolved just in time for the media representatives to get to their respective units before the Operation Iraqi Freedom combat phase began on the 20th of March. Had the equipment been delayed any longer the entire embedding process might not have happened at all because the military was unwilling to take the risk of having anyone in the units unprotected from chemical weapons.

The second major issue was the fact that very few of the media returned the gear when they disembedded. The military issued the NBC Equipment to the media using standard military hand-receipts for the property. The DOD plan called for the media to turn the equipment in to the supply sergeants of the units they were with or bring it back to the CPIC-Kuwait where they received it. The media representatives who were embedded from home station and drew their equipment from the units they deployed with generally followed the rules and returned the equipment to the unit. The Embedded Media who were issued the equipment in Kuwait generally did not follow the rules and threw the equipment away or kept it. This action resulted in the loss of several hundred thousand dollars in government NBC equipment and the loss of NBC antidote and other controlled medical substances. The military tried to get the equipment back by sending letters to each person who did not return the equipment and their news media organizations. The cooperation by the media was less than stellar. In the end, a very large Report of Survey was done for the equipment and a large amount of NBC Equipment was written off as lost.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE NBC EQUIPMENT ISSUE

The plan the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (OSD-PA) developed for the NBC Equipment of issuing the equipment to the media when they embedded with the unit at home-station was a good one and it was well executed. The problem occurred with the fact that most of the embeds had to link up with their units in Kuwait. There was no initial directive for anyone to provide the equipment. Major Tim Blair describes the result, "This was a messy issue from the start on availability of NBC equipment—and at one point reached the GEN Franks/GEN Myers level to seek support from commanders."⁹

The recommendation is that if a large scale embedding ever occurs on this scale again OSD must plan it early so that the media can link up with their units prior to deploying to the combat theater. There should be a branch of the plan that designates the Army as the Executive Agent to provide the equipment. Additionally, OSD-PA should hold a meeting with the media executives to establish procedures to ensure that equipment loaned to the Media Embeds would be charged to organizations they represent and not simply written off by the military as the cost of doing business.

One of the biggest problems relating to the failure of the media to return the equipment is that controlled substances such as atropine and other chemical antidotes were simply discarded by the media. To simply discard these controlled substances is reckless and could result in the death or injury to Iraqi or American children who happen to find and play with these items.

Additionally, the loss results in the possibility of Americans not having needed chemical protection in a time of war. All parties must find a way to ensure proper accountability and control is maintained for all equipment at all times.

THURAYA SATELLITE PHONES

During the height of Operation Iraqi Freedom CENTCOM made the decision to discontinue the use of Thuraya Satellite phones by anyone in or traveling with the Coalition. The policy represented a huge issue for the Embedded Media traveling with the Coalition because in many cases the phone was their only connection to their news outlet. Without the ability to communicate the Media Embed is useless.

THURAYA DISCUSSION

The Thuraya Satellite phone is a product of a United Arab Emirates based consortium; the phones perform best in the Middle East because of the satellite constellation in the region. The Thuraya was the communication device of choice by most media representatives because it has the ability to transmit voice, data, fax and short messages. It also has a Global Positioning

System capability¹⁰ (which made the military intelligence community suspect it was being used by the Iraqi's to target coalition forces).

On 3 April 2003, Central Command (CENTCOM) issued the following news release banning all Thuraya Satellite phones :

USE OF THURAYA PHONES DISCONTINUED

CAMP DOHA, Kuwait -- Recent intelligence reporting indicates Thuraya satellite phone services may have been compromised. For this reason, Thuraya phones use has been discontinued on the battlefields in Iraq.

The phones now represent a security risk to units and personnel on the battlefield. This impacts the more than 500 Thuraya phones that were being used by U.S. Forces in the CENTCOM area as well as the media traveling with units in Iraq.

Military units have been directed to assist journalists, to the greatest extent possible, with transmission of their news products using military means. News organizations that desire to provide their reporters in the field with alternative communications equipment can deliver it to the Coalition Information Press Center and efforts will be made to deliver that equipment during normal resupply operations.¹¹

There are three key issues that the ban caused both the military and the media—the need to file stories without the Thuraya; the difficulty of getting alternative phones to the media, and the inconsistent interpretation of the policy.

The release states that the military will assist journalists to the maximum extent possible, by allowing them to use military means. Many military personnel did allow the media to transmit stories via military means, but the problem was finding field computers that were not being used was very difficult and could not be counted on as a means for transmission.

There was inconsistent interpretation of ban on Thuraya phones by the different military services. The Marines responded to the CENTCOM News release by confiscating all Thuraya phones in the MEF. The Army for the most part allowed the media representatives to keep their phones and even allowed the media to continue using the phone. Ron Martz describes the situation with one Army unit, "We had gotten word about a week into the war that certain commands were banning Thurayas because they felt the enemy could use them to pinpoint artillery attacks. But the company commander, said to us, "You know, they're really trying to crack down on the use of the Thurayas and they're taking them away from some reporters. The only thing I ask of you guys is that you don't use them while we're under artillery attack and

don't use them to tell anybody where we are or where we are going. If you follow those ground rules, you can continue to use it as far as I'm concerned."¹²

There is also a credibility problem at work with this issue. The media believed that the military knew there might be a problem with the Thuraya and did not warn them. Jeff Goldman of CBS put it this way,

I think DOD should have warned people in advance on this. I distinctly remember Pentagon meetings in the fall; the issue of Thuraya's was brought up. People wanted to know if they would be acceptable and not a security risk. Obviously, if the security issue was a new problem then the military had to act; however, I feel certain that our intelligence people would know going into the conflict what communications gear would pose security issues. One consistent problem was that once those phones were confiscated they were NEVER returned to the journalists. That was sloppy work on the part of PAO's and a very costly loss to the journalists.¹³

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE THURAYA PHONES

This is one issue that the media and many public affairs professionals agree was not done right from beginning to end. It must be addressed before we conduct another large scale embed. It is also clear that the intelligence community had legitimate concerns about the ability of the enemy to locate the Thuraya phones, but did not communicate that concern to the public affairs community or the media before combat began. The following are excellent suggestions to fix this problem:

- "Conduct a study on media communications to ensure that it will not interfere with battlefield operating systems."¹⁴
- "I am sure our NSA and other agency people know which devices work and don't work to keep our communications secure in various theaters and certainly there can be a way to smooth this issue out in the future."¹⁵
- "Analysis needs to be done on technology needed to transmit stories to ensure we don't get caught in the same predicament in the future. There is quite a bit of technology out there to accomplish the media's mission without losing signal transmission ability."¹⁶
- "For future embeds, we need them to provide details of the types of comms they intend to use and this data should be fed into Army OPSEC/INTEL/G6 processes for evaluation. That said, we probably need to develop a process for doing this sort of evaluation on short notice."¹⁷

The two coins of the realm for the media are information and communications. If the media cannot communicate they cannot provide the information needed to do their job. The

military must tell the media upfront that there may be problems with a particular mode of communication and recommend that they bring back-up means or have organic assets available to allow them to do their job if the primary means is compromised. There needs to be constant dialogue and evaluation prior to the start of conflict between the military and the media to identify the best means of transmission and the best transmission equipment for the theater. This is an example of a win-win situation -- the military gains credibility while the media representatives are better able to do their jobs.

ASSIGNING MEDIA TO COMBAT UNITS

There has been much criticism of the DOD in certain circles regarding how media were assigned to various units during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Much of the discussion has to do with the fairness of assigning media to the combat units. The media saw assignment at the tip of the spear as much more prestigious than being assigned with service support units.

But not all journalists were treated the same or had similar experiences. Some journalists were aboard aircraft carriers; such as the USS Lincoln stationed miles offshore. Some were with artillery units that were stationed far behind the front lines. Only about 50 to 60 journalists actually had front row seats for combat. And once a reporter accepted an embedding assignment, he or she had to stay with the unit. If they left they couldn't return. The experience and the view of the war depended on what unit a reporter was assigned.¹⁸

Additionally, some media representatives thought that the assignment process was arbitrary and showed favoritism.

MEDIA ASSIGNMENT DISCUSSION

Although there was some criticism of the assignment process, the overall effort was actually one of the best aspects of the entire Media Embedding Program. DOD went to enormous lengths to ensure that there was a fair analysis done to distribute the slots to the media based on the agreements by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ASD-PA) Victoria Clarke and the major media executives.

Major Tim Blair, the officer charged with developing the process describes the effort:

I am very biased on this one and was basically operating as a one-man show for the most part when it came to allocating the media to the units in theater. We developed an equity system with the major networks and decided to give each of them the same number of slots and disperse them evenly throughout the major units. Print media was a little different issue -- in order to develop a metric to guide us towards equality we used a listing of the top 100 papers based on circulation -- by using this system we were able to allocate XX number of slots to the top five papers, XX numbers of slots (less than the top five) for papers listed 6-10, and so on with fewer slots being allocated to each of the groups based on

their circulation. Wire services, radio, and magazines were based on circulation as well. At the DOD level, we did the Macro planning to ensure an even spread of the major news sources through the large units in theater – the micro level work as you know was then on the shoulders of the division level PAOs to spread the talent throughout their organization.¹⁹

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE MEDIA ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

The media assignment process stands as one of the best efforts to support the embedding program. Major Blair and all the other PA professionals down to the Division PAOs worked the assignment issue very hard before and during the campaign. The consensus from the majority of the military and media was that "it was done about as well as it could have been."²⁰ The media invested huge amounts of money time and talent in the media-embedding venture. They wanted to get the best possible return on their investment. The military provided the opportunity for most to be positioned for success, but unfortunately... "some units were better than others for an embed, but that was the luck of the draw and fate."²¹

EMBEDDING INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

The United States Media Embedding Program featured 20 % international media; however, the program has been sharply criticized for not having enough Arab and other international media represented. John Simpson of the British Broadcasting Corporation describes the international perception, "If the Americans and British had taken in Al-Jazeera and others properly and made them part of the planning, you'd have had much better coverage in the Middle East...the world is changing. Treating foreign journalists as the enemy simply because they are foreign does no good."²²

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA DISCUSSION

International media representation remains one of the most difficult issues of the entire embedding process. On one hand, the United States committed to counter the Iraqi propaganda machine by including a very strong international representation while ensuring that the American outlets had the slots they needed. On the other hand, DOD took the chance that by embedding international media (especially Arab media) the embedded reporters might contribute to Anti-American propaganda.

Although the issue of the international media representation remains a concern, DOD did an excellent job of providing slots to non-U.S. media. The issue of Arab media was and still is the true strategic dilemma for DOD. There are two aspects of the Arab Media dilemma that must be addressed: Operational Security (OPSEC) and host-nation sensitivities.

DOD developed the Embedding Program, but the execution was placed on the shoulders of the commanders in the field. Their mission is to provide access to information to allow media to report, but to protect the information at the source. Many commanders were very supportive of the program and offered significant access to the war plans and other essential, but classified information to trusted media representatives. "Rick Atkinson (Washington Post) and Jim Dwyer (New York Times) were allowed significant access to the war plans by MG Petreus (101st Division Commander) while others who were less trustworthy (Geraldo Rivera from FOX News) were not allowed complete access to information."²³

The problem for commanders was who to trust. If the media were allowed access to the operations center and either intentionally or unintentionally disclosed the plans the entire Coalition war effort could be jeopardized and thousands of coalition deaths could result. Each commander had to wrestle with the question, "which media do I trust"? Unfortunately, the obvious bias favorable to the Iraqi cause by most of the Arab media caused most American commanders to conclude that Arab media could not be trusted with classified information.

The Kuwaiti host nation sensitivities caused additional problems for the embedding program. DOD published a list of media that were to embed in various locations with the U.S. military only to find that Al-Jazeera and Israeli media were banned from Kuwait; this situation not only caused embarrassment for the United States; but it was also seen by much of the Arab world as American discrimination against Arab media. COL Gary Hovatter describes the situation, "For reasons still unknown... this allegedly inter-agency coordinated list contained media that were totally unacceptable to the host nation of Kuwait. The issue of these media (particularly the Israeli press) was a major diplomatic issue/concern to the government of Kuwait. Either the list was not, in fact, interagency coordinated, or the coordination was unsatisfactory. It is likely that similar situations will/would arise in almost any future operational area."²⁴

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

The handling of the International Media during Operation Iraqi Freedom was very successful; however, the unresolved issue of the program is the interaction with the Arab media. On one hand the United States needs the Arab media to communicate with and improve its image in the Arab World; on the other hand the communication can never compromise operational security to the point that it costs the lives of American Servicemen/ women.

Major Tim Blair describes the problem and one suggested solution, "The Kuwait vs. Al Jazeera issue was something that, in my opinion, caught us off guard and should have been

planned more thoroughly. We were able to work around this by linking some of them up with their units once they reached Iraq but it was not a user-friendly process. We needed the Arab media - could we have done better - probably - I think we would have been better served if we would have had an expert on Arab media working with us during the allocation process for these slots - by doing this we would have had a heads up on the different sticking points with Arab media (like the Kuwait/Al Jazeera issue).²⁵

The United States must become as sophisticated in its analysis and strategic communications efforts as it is with the kinetic aspects of warfare. It is not enough to defeat a foe on the battlefield; we must be equally savvy at winning the hearts and minds of the populace. It is not only a DOD issue, the Defense Science Board just published a monograph entitled "*Strategic Communication*" that recommends that the National Command Authority stand up a Strategic Communications Office so that the United States synchronizes its messages and develops deliberate approaches to handling Arab media and communicating its messages to the Arab street.²⁶

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON EMBEDDING

Media embedding is not a flash in the pan, but the way of the future. Neither the news media themselves nor the American or international publics will allow the military to place the "cone of silence" on its operations ever again. It is imperative that the policy makers at DOD and at the National Command Authority recognize that embedding challenges are also tremendous opportunities to communicate the goodness of the military and counter enemy propaganda. The following recommendations will ensure that the problems and mistakes outlined in the paper are not repeated in the future:

- "That Congress fund and the President appoint a Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communication, equivalent in rank to a deputy head of a cabinet department and report to the National Security Advisor and to the NSC. The NSC Deputy for Strategic Communications would serve as the President's principle advisor on all matter relating to strategic communications."²⁷ *With this position established, the Strategic Communications efforts, to include media embedded, have the highest-level buy-in and sanction. Furthermore, media embedding can be synchronized with all other governmental strategic communications efforts to have the best effect.*
- Establish an independent, non-profit, non-partisan Center for Strategic Communication.²⁸ *The Center would be an ideal place to conduct a significant research project that will include American and International media and their military counterparts*

to study media embedding and conduct a critical analysis of its past, present and future. This project will go a long way toward preventing many of the mistakes I have outlined in this paper and continuing a dialogue that must occur between the military and the media on embedding.

- DOD should hold a Summit much like it did in 1983 to review the Principles of Information.²⁹ *The purpose of the Summit would be to capture key lessons and to build upon the positive relationship between the media and the military that existed during Operation Iraqi Freedom while the issue is still fresh and the players are still available. To not hold a Summit will risk the devolution of relations back to their pre OIF state.*

The days are past of the media and the military having symposiums where both parts have a group hug and proclaim how good media embedding was for all concerned with the process. There needs to a concerted effort on the part of both the DOD and the media to continue the dialogue on how to evolve the process for the current and future conflicts. The recommendations I have outlined above will achieve that dialogue. The lessons learned from Operation Iraqi Freedom of equipping and manning the media must be applied so that future efforts become win-win situations not only for the military and the media, but also for the viewers who are the ultimate decision makers as to the success of the embedding program.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Alicia C. Shepherd, *Narrowing the Gap: Military, Media and the Iraq War* (Chicago, Illinois, Robert T. McCormick Tribune Foundation, 2004), 32.

² Ibid., 32

³ John Gay, United States Navy, Public Affairs Officer, U.S.S. George Washington, electronic mail interview by author with Lieutenant Gay, 9 November 2004.

⁴ Shepherd, 33.

⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁶ Jeff Goldman, Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) News' Embedding Producer, electronic mail interview by author, 13 December 2004.

⁷ Gary Hovatter, Chief of the Army Public Affairs Center (APAC), Fort Meade Maryland, electronic mail interview by the author with Colonel Hovatter, 15 November 2004.

⁸ Rick Wright, Researcher for the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), electronic mail interview by the author, 19 November 2004.

⁹ Timothy Blair, Department of Defense Media Embedding Project Officer, electronic mail interview by the author with Major Blair, 19 November 2004.

¹⁰ Thuraya Satellite Telecommunications Company, "Flexible Dual Mode Technology," available from <<http://www.thuraya.com/products/>>; Internet; accessed 2 February 2005.

¹¹ Headquarters United States Central Command, "News Release 03-04-43, Use Of Thuraya Phones Discontinued," Camp Doha, Kuwait, 3 April 2003. Available from <http://www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/News_Release.asp?NewsRelease=20030443.txt>; Internet accessed 14 March 2005.

¹² Ron Martz, "Crossing the Journalistic Divide," in *Embedded*, eds. William Katovsky and Timothy Carlson (Guilford, CT: Lyon Press, 2003), 367.

¹³ Goldman

¹⁴ Wright

¹⁵ Goldman.

¹⁶ Blair.

¹⁷ Hovatter.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Blair.

²⁰ Hovatter.

²¹ Shepherd, 40.

²² Goldman.

²³ Shepherd, 67.

²⁴ Hovatter.

²⁵ Blair.

²⁶ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, September 2004), 46.

²⁷ Ibid., 63.

²⁸ Ibid., 69.

²⁹ Charles W. Ricks, *The Military-News Media Relationship: Thinking Forward* (Carlisle Barracks: U. S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1 December, 1993), 8.

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